Alki • Volume 40, Number 2

Trends in UFO-Related Archival Collections

D.M. Luftig E.S. Cukier

Washington Library Association

Published on: Aug 07, 2024

URL: https://alki.pubpub.org/pub/n288780p

License: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0)

Abstract

Although unidentified flying objects (UFOs) have long held the public's attention, most research has been conducted by federal agencies who have typically restricted access to such research by classifying or denying the research altogether.[1] As a result, countless researchers have taken it upon themselves to investigate the phenomenon over the decades with some of this research making its way into publicly accessible archives.

This study provides a history of UFO-related research and archival collections, through an examination of trends gleaned via an inventory of publicly accessible physical collections. The study found that within North America there are sixty-two unique, non-federal collections spread across universities, museums, public libraries, and historical societies. Twenty-two of these collections exclusively contain UFO research content.

Collections were created by those who thought UFOs were misidentified objects (the original federal conclusion) and those who believed that there was more to the phenomenon. UFO archival collections started to catch on in the 1970s and are amongst the most popular at their institutions today.

Introduction

The modern unidentified flying object (UFO) phenomenon has been of ongoing interest for over seventy-five years. In 2017, the *New York Times* reported that the U.S. Defense Department was spending tens of millions of dollars annually investigating what they called "unexplained aerial phenomena" while simultaneously concealing such programs.[2]

Within recent years, multiple federal agencies have claimed to be providing greater transparency with regard to sharing information and research. Such self-proclaimed transparency has been undermined by decades of subterfuge. This history has caused extensive mistrust by the public regarding what their government knows and shares, which has led individuals and organizations to conduct their own research on UFOs. Some have written books, given lectures, appeared at conferences and conventions, and generally participated in the market for UFO content with the result being an extensive body of research.

UFO research documents include field reports, interviews, instrument reports, notes and journals, correspondence, images, medical and therapeutic records, and more. The material exists as paper documents, various audio/visual formats, and physical objects.

There are relatively standard reasons that researchers, in any field, choose to donate their collections. This includes a desire to preserve one's work and make it discoverable while utilizing best practices. An archive will also typically be able to contextualize the collection in a way that is agreeable to the creator, often by including it among other, similar, collections. Several UFO researchers have stated that this is what is most important to them.[3] A researcher may also want to support a particular institution (typically their home university or

organization). There might be a financial incentive to donate a collection. However, despite a desire to share these collections, a lack of institutional interest frequently limits a researcher's ability to do so.

Like most research collections, UFO collections typically come from their creator or creator's estate. Although donation information is not available for about a quarter of UFO collections located, the only instances of a collection being purchased by an archive are parts of the *Gray Barker UFO Collection*, which was purchased by the Clarksburg-Harrison Public Library and parts of the *Otto Binder Collection*, which were purchased by Texas A&M University.[4]

This study seeks to provide a history of UFO research collections in publicly accessible archives. This encompasses an examination of the trajectory of UFO collection depositions, the types of archives that house them, the stated beliefs and affiliations of their creators, and a broad summary of the content contained therein. The results give a contextual roadmap for future researchers to understand which perspectives, from which positions of power (or not), have shaped UFO research and discourse over time, as well as reason to re-evaluate how we hold appropriate and respectful space for people with inexplicable experiences to share their (often traumatic) stories.

Terminology

Within the last decade, there has been an increased change in terminology away from UFO to the more agnostic unidentified aerial phenomena, and most recently to unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP).[5] This is the terminology currently used at the federal level. Such changes were intended to broaden the scope of acknowledged unexplainable phenomena.[6] Due to this larger scope, combined with the historical interest related to UFOs, this study will focus solely on UFO research. Simply put, these are collections that have research regarding an unknown object that appears to be flying to the observer. Because of this distinction, the term UFO is used.

Since the earliest days of the modern UFO phenomenon, some have made the connection to extraterrestrials (ETs), others, or visitors. Reports of UFO abductions increased in the late 1960s. These experiences were often traumatic for those involved.[7] Typically, those who have been abducted refer to themselves as "experiencers." Because this is their preferred term, this is the term that will be used in this study.[8]

People who study and/or describe UFO-related phenomena attribute their causes in different ways. Although potentially reductionist, for the sake of providing a narrative, this project has divided these UFO researchers into two camps. The first is those who agree with traditional federal conclusions (e.g. UFOs are misidentified objects). This study refers to this camp as "supporters." Secondly, there are those who are skeptical of federal conclusions and think there's more to the phenomenon than the initial government findings. This study refers to this group as "skeptics" (as they were skeptical of the government's early conclusion). Other accounts express views which are either more complicated or defy classification. This analysis remains agnostic to any hypotheses of the true basis of UFO phenomena.

Background

Unidentified Flying Objects through the Ages

The pre-history and the birth of the modern UFO phenomenon has been discussed, summarized, and poorly dramatized on cable television so often that it seems redundant to repeat it here.[9] That said, there are several pieces of background information that help to better contextualize the modern UFO phenomenon and the research around it.

Unexplained and/or fantastic phenomena in the sky has been a topic of works from across cultures for millennia. Such work has been archived for as long as there have been institutions doing such work. Typically, such content was viewed through a religious framework.[10] In the late 19th Century, there were thousands of sightings of large vessels (or sometimes lights) which were called airships and were voraciously reported upon.[11] Such sightings were typically reported through a framework of advanced technology and not religious symbolism.

Charles Fort was the first prominent researcher to extensively utilize modern libraries and archival collections to collect data on paranormal activities (which he summarized and wrote about). At the dawn of the 20th Century, Fort scoured libraries, including the New York Public Library and the British Museum, looking for reports of the weird and paranormal, which were typically found in the newspaper collections. Fort's writing, methodology, and data would influence the UFO research movement that followed.

Scholars typically say the modern UFO phenomenon began in June of 1947 when commercial pilot Kenneth Arnold reported seeing nine mysterious flying objects near Mt. Rainier in Washington.[12] Arnold's story became a national sensation and soon other UFO reports gripped the public's attention. By mid-summer, the American public was captivated by what has been called "the flying saucer craze" of 1947. During June and July of 1947, 850 documented sightings across the U.S. and Canada were reported.[13] This project uses the Arnold event as its starting point.

Methodology

The subsequent analyses draw from an inventory and evaluation of publicly accessible archives in North America, which have physical research collections with some component of original UFO research within them. Original research is defined broadly as data collection, observation, or original synthesis of UFO research. This includes recorded observations, analysis of existing data, interviews, lectures, and correspondence. This excludes collections entirely made up of published content; a publicly accessible archive is one that can be visited by a scholar physically (although they may have digital content). Our scope excludes private organizations that have closed archival collections.

Archival collections were identified through searches in ArchiveGrid, WorldCat, Google, and by word of mouth. Searches utilized keyword search strings and subject terms.[14] Institutional finding aids were used to confirm the presence and type of content. Some details were confirmed through emails, conversations, or formal interviews with archivists. Typically, content descriptions were given at box or folder level, making a granular evaluation of resources unfeasible.

Due to time constraints, only archives in North America with English finding aids were inventoried, which limits the generalizability of findings. It is also worth noting that the limitations of our methods and the shortcomings of our historical narrative most likely come at the expense of the same voices that are typically excluded from archival histories, which will be discussed later.

This study identified sixty-two unique archival collections that met our standard for inclusion and twenty-two of these collections were focused on just UFO research.[15] To provide a timeline, collection dates were assigned by the year that they were first accessioned. This methodology misrepresents some information, as some collections were accessioned over several years and the UFO content within a collection may not have been accessioned during that first year. This compromise was made for multiple reasons. First, a timeline provides an easy way to create a narrative around such collections. Second, many finding aids do not provide clear accessioning data down to the folder or item level. Third, when asked, some archivists were unsure of actual accession dates.

Part of our analysis was to plot the availability of collections over time along with several variables. Such variables included the type of institution that held the collection, the general belief held by the creator, federal affiliation, size of collection, approximate amount of collection containing UFO-related content, when the collection was accessioned, who donated the collection, and whether the collection has first-hand experiencer content.

Findings

Early Federal Reports & Esteemed Scientists

As interest (and occasional panic) gripped the country, the United States Air Force (USAF) began to formally investigate the UFO phenomena, starting in 1948 with Project Sign. In the two decades following Project Sign, the USAF conducted other large investigations including Project Grudge (1949 - ca. 1951) and the enormous Project Blue Book (1952-1969). Generally, the purpose of these studies was to determine the source of UFO sightings, assess potential threats to national security, and mitigate public anxiety. Although the USAF conducted the largest and most well-known UFO research, other federal agencies, such as the CIA, also conducted research.[16]

Those federal reports all reached a similar conclusion which was that UFOs were mundane and misidentified objects that posed no security threat. But because of a perceived oversimplification of those conclusions,

growing governmental mistrust, and the high number of sightings, such reports did little to alleviate the public's interest or anxiety.

The federal research content from its first UFO report, Project Sign, was deposited in 1949 at the USAF archives at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB) in Dayton, Ohio, which would become the depositing ground for the subsequent reports. Although Project Sign was classified, a non-classified summary was made available to the public. This marked both the first time that modern UFO research would enter an archive and the first time an archive would provide any UFO research content to the public.

The federal UFO reports of the time would conclude in 1969 with the decades-long Project Blue Book. At its close, Blue Book staff sent fifty cubic feet of records and artifacts to Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.[17] The Air Force transferred the records to the National Archives and Records Service in 1975, which opened them to the public in 1976 after de-identifying contributors to the case files.[18] The Project Blue Book Collection now comprises forty-two cubic feet of materials, photos, artifacts, sound recordings, and films, and much of the content is available on microfilm.[19]

If Project Sign set a precedent for archiving UFO research, it also set one for the classification of such research (which led to what has been called an overclassification problem).[20] Although the federal government made certain sections or summaries of various reports available, most were not open. The possible reasons for such secrecy are as contested as UFOs.[21] Over the last decade though, the U.S. government has attempted to appear more transparent. The actual results of such attempts are marginal compared to those of many other countries.[22]

The scientists who collaborated on these federal reports and the academic scientists who embraced them are well represented within the archives and were amongst the first individuals to have UFO research accessioned into any publicly accessible archive. Edward Condon was one of the early prominent scientists most associated with early UFO research. Condon was a theoretical physicist who spearheaded an extensive study with other scientists in 1968, colloquially known as the Condon Report.[23] The Condon Report (and the Condon Committee) was established to provide a scientific examination of UFOs. Aside from his many scientific achievements, Condon was known for being publicly contemptuous of the UFO phenomenon. Condon has two separate collections located at the University of Colorado and at the American Philosophical Society. Other collections from Condon Committee members include materials from Donald Menzel and Roy Craig.[24] Other prominent scientists to have collections with UFO research content accessioned include Manhattan Project members, including those of Samuel A. Goudsmit, Franklin E. Roach, and Leon Davidson.[25]

Although most of the scientists who collaborated on these early UFO research reports were supporters of the federal conclusions, two were not so convinced. University of Arizona physicist James McDonald served on the Condon Committee but had misgivings about the report.[26] McDonald argued that the small percentage of UFO reports that were still unexplainable, when viewed cumulatively, warranted greater scientific scrutiny.[27] A more controversial figure, J. Allen Hynek,was an astronomer who was instrumental in the establishment of the

Condon Committee. Hynek was a professor at Northwestern University and was outspoken on the topic of UFOs, first as a proponent of the federal conclusions and later as a skeptic.[28]

The year 1970 would see the conclusion of the U.S. government's acknowledged UFO research projects. In the ensuing years, scientists would continue to deposit their UFO research into archives. What would change though, was the addition of materials skeptical of the conclusions of early federal reports.

A Growing Interest

A new crop of UFO researchers grew throughout the 1960s. This group had more pronounced differences in their personal backgrounds, methodologies utilized, personal experience with the topic, and hypotheses and beliefs.

This interest is reflected in the number of publications on the subject (see Fig. 1). Between 1961 to 1970, the number of publications locatable in OCLC WorldCat (both fictional and non-fictional) increased over four-fold from 91 to 420. And although there are ebbs and flows within each five-year period, a new baseline was established in 1966.

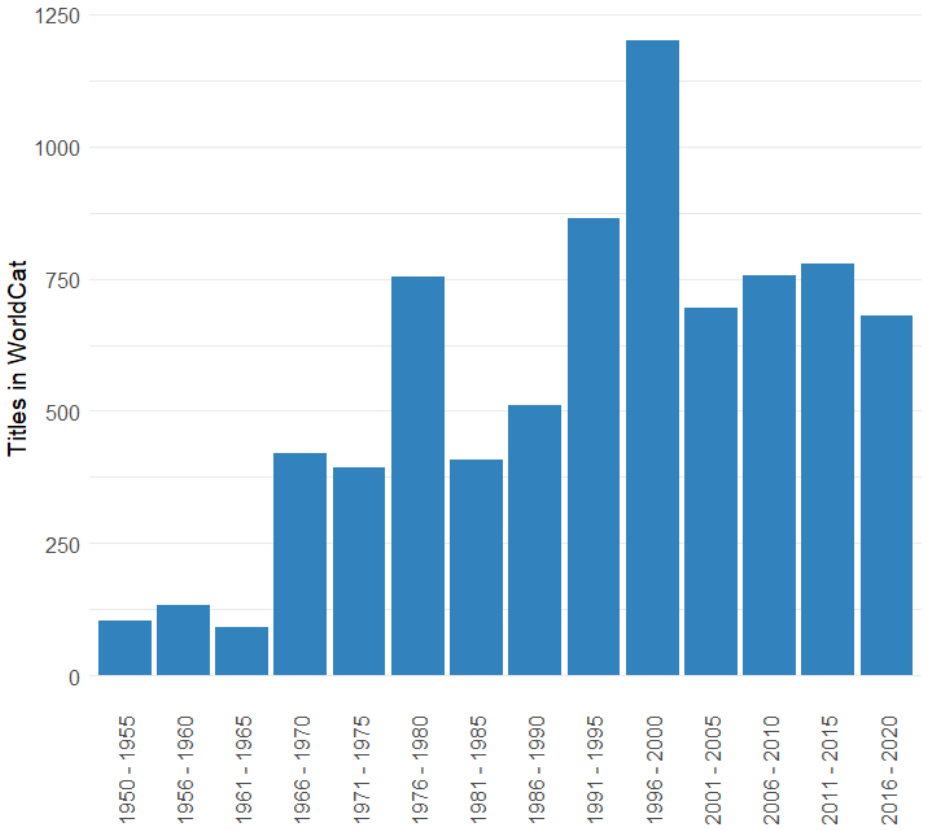

Figure 1. Number of WorldCat Items related to UFOs by publication year.

The mid-1960s also saw the emergence of a greater number of groups studying UFOs. These groups varied in size, regionality, structure, beliefs, and scope. These groups included scientists who typically agreed with government reports (such as the large Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), groups who were less certain of the source of the phenomenon (such as Aerial Phenomena Research Organization), and groups who fully embraced the ET hypothesis (such as the Space Age Club in Chicago).[29] Some UFO research groups were informal, consisting of a few friends or community members; others were large international organizations. Many of these groups, and the research they conducted, disappeared over the years.

The largest and longest continually running group is the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), founded in 1969 as the Midwest UFO Network. MUFON was born from skepticism of the federal research of the 1960s. MUFON has chapters in all U.S. states and in over fifty countries.[30] MUFON is the most represented UFO organization within publicly accessible archives, appearing in 21% of the collections within our inventory (13 of 62 collections). MUFON also holds the largest quantity of materials; there are several large collections composed almost entirely of MUFON resources.[31]

Experiencer Research

By the 1970s, the UFO research community had become increasingly polarized due to the rise of the experiencer narrative (traditionally called a UFO abduction). Aside from the arguments amongst UFO researchers and hobbyists, this narrative also changed what research was produced and how it could be archived.

In September 1961, Betty and Barney Hill reported what has become the archetypal experiencer encounter. The Hills recounted a story of a post-vacation drive from Canada to New Hampshire, where they saw a flying saucer, experienced lost time, and found unexplained physical alterations (such as torn and dirty clothes). Under hypnotic regression, the Hills described being abducted by ETs, who were small in stature and had large eyes. These ETs, who communicated telepathically, took the Hills upon their craft and conducted medical procedures.

With the rise of experiencers, UFO research now had a clinical element to it. Therapists were involved and issues of patient confidentiality had to be considered. Archival collections now contained material that described assaults and trauma–some with names and identifiable details. Furthermore, this research would be complicated by three issues. First, the common therapy used to recover lost memories was hypnosis (or hypnotic regression therapy), which is a controversial treatment.[32] Second, some of the individuals providing this therapy had little, if any, formal training. Third, the experiencer might not be the actual author of the collection.

Not all therapists were amateurs though. One of the most well-known therapists and experiencer researchers was John E. Mack.[33] Mack, an M.D., had been a trained child psychologist, won a Nobel Prize in literature,

and was a professor at Harvard University. Mack's collection is currently being accessioned into Rice University. It is worth noting that there are no best practices for archives dealing with experiencer content aside from those that already exist for doctor-patient content. Recently, the Rice University Woodson Research Center has decided to embark on a larger scale de-identification process based on such concerns.

Analysis

Deposition Trends

The first collection with UFO research content to be accessioned was most likely *Leon Davidson's Flying Saucer Collection* at the Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library, which began its accessioning in 1962.[34] From the 1970s through 2000s, institutional archives accessioned nine to eleven collections per decade. Between 2010 and 2019, this number jumped substantially to seventeen collections accessioned, and three were accessioned between 2020-2023. Overall, 27% of collections (17 of 62) were accessioned between 2013-2019.

The type of archival institution was categorized as (a) college/university, (b) scientific society/museum (such as an air and space museum), or (3) public library/historical society. Of the collections, colleges/universities held almost 73% (45), museums/scientific societies held 14.5% (9), and public libraries/historical societies held 13% (8) (see Fig. 2).

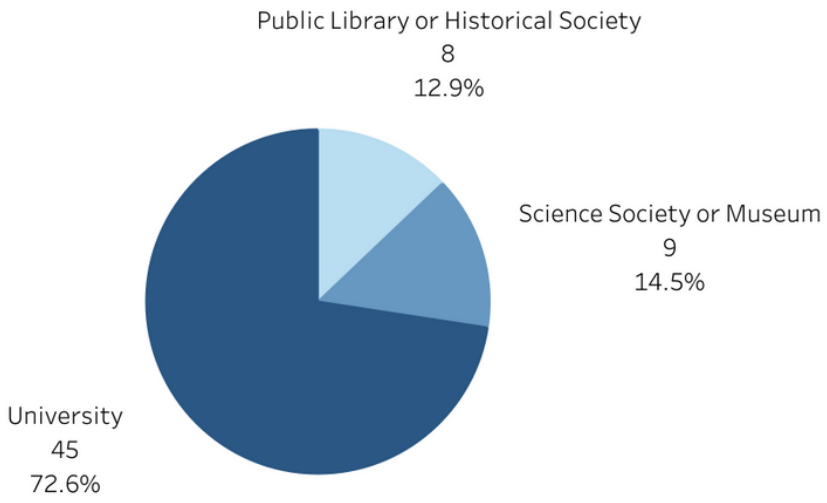

Figure 2. Proportion of UFO-related collections donated to different types of archival institutions.

Acquisitions went to colleges/universities and museums/scientific societies with comparable frequency through the 1970s, after which accessions to museums/scientific societies dropped off considerably. At this point, more archives went to public institutions–with colleges and universities still taking the lion's share (Fig. 3).

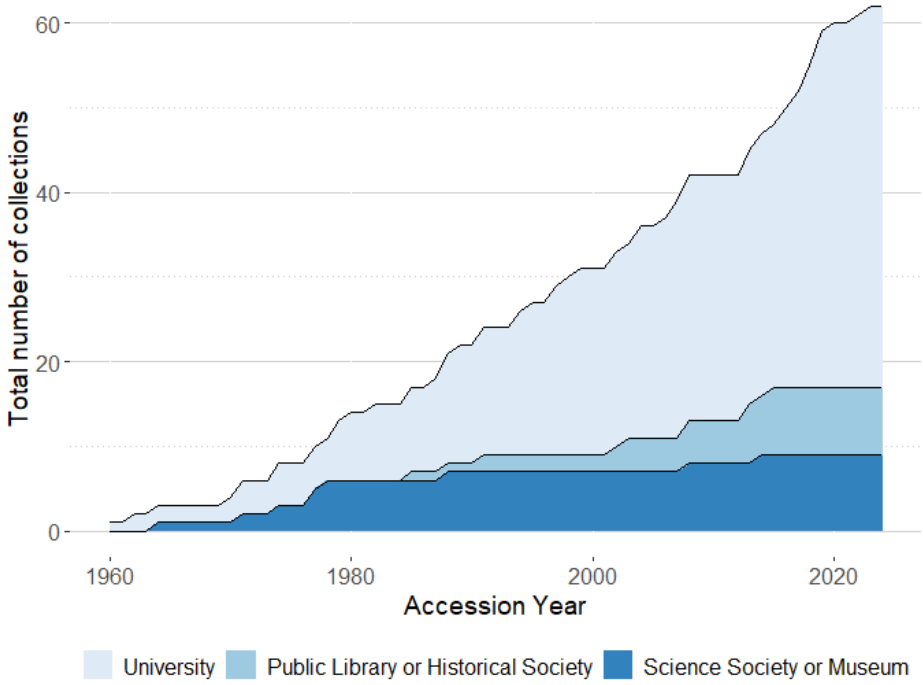

Figure 3. Availability of public UFO-related collections over time, broken down by college or university library, public libraries and historical societies, and scientific societies and museums. Year is determined by earliest year a collection was accessioned into an archive. Instances where the same individual donated to two separate institutions are treated as separate collections.

Official / Federal Ties

Most of the creators of these collections had been employed by the federal government.[35] For this study, a federal affiliation could be a federal government or military job within the U.S. or another country. Individuals with known federal contracts, but who were not federal employees, were counted separately. Creator affiliations were determined for 55 of the 62 collections: 33 had a federal appointment, 18 had no known federal appointment, and 4 had federal contract positions (Fig. 4).[36]

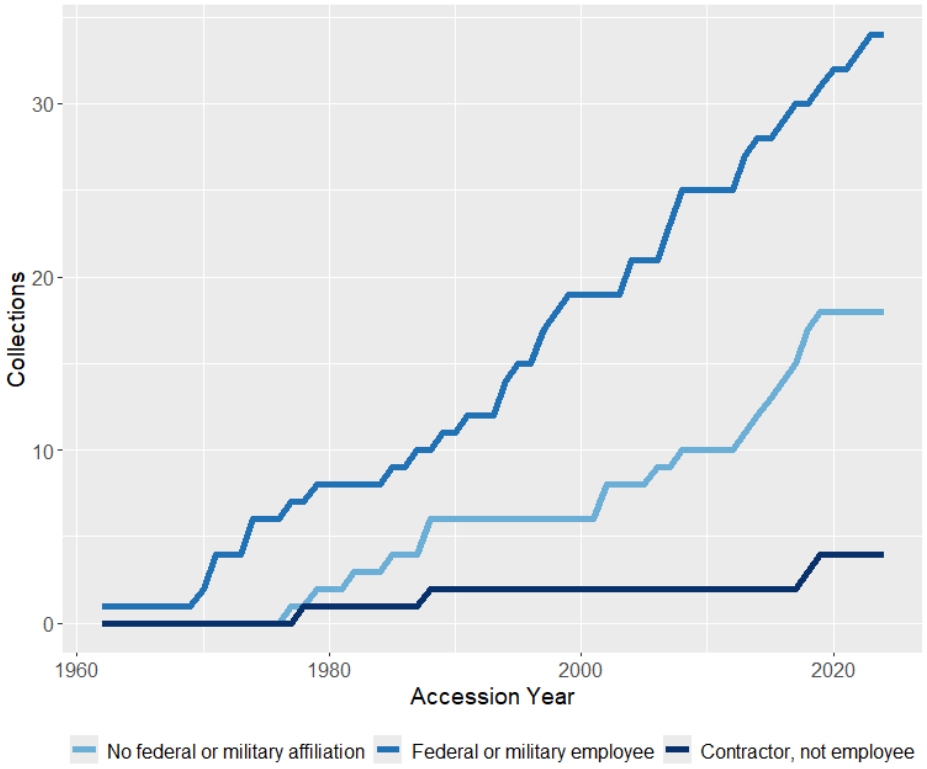

Figure 4. Availability of public UFO-related collections over time with respect to creator's military or federal affiliation. For the first decade of their availability, almost all came from creators affiliated with the military or federal government.

Beliefs

For each collection, information was encoded regarding the subject's belief in federal report conclusions about UFOs.[37] For this study, subjects are classified into (a) federal conclusion supporters (those who agreed that UFOs were misidentified objects), (b) federal conclusion skeptics (those who thought there was more to the phenomenon than known science could explain), or (c) "it's complicated" or (d) unknown.[38] Although reductionist, such categorization allows for interesting analysis.[39] When possible, collections from groups were coded if they clearly fit one of those categories (e.g. a MUFON collection was coded as a federal conclusion skeptic).

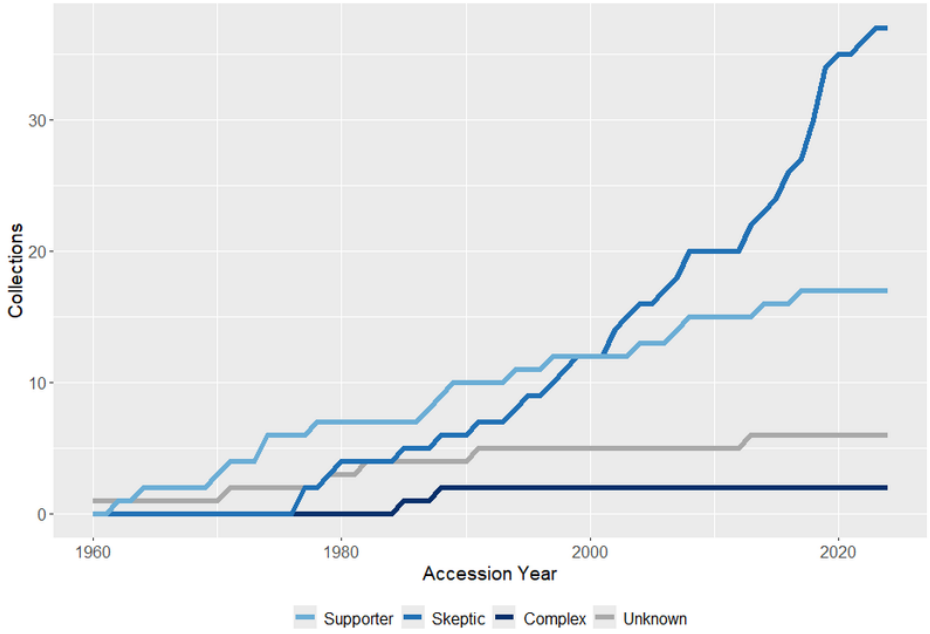

Figure 5. Availability of UFO-related collections in public archives, based on creator's tendency to concur with or question US government official reports.

Earlier depositions were more likely to come from supporters of the traditional federal conclusions (Fig. 5). Such collections were often created by those involved with the early committees charged with investigating UFO phenomena. By the mid-1970s, the balance had shifted to favor collections from those who doubted federal conclusions. The first two collections from that group began accession in 1977. The *Ivan Terence Sanderson Papers* are held at the American Philosophical Society.[40] Sanderson was a botanist, zoologist, and author who was interested in many aspects of the paranormal (most notably cryptozoology). The *Chief Dan Katchongva Collection* was accessioned into the Braun Research Library of the Southwest Museum (which later merged with the Museum of the American West and the Autry National Center).[41] Chief Dan Katchongva was a Hopi leader who was interested in UFO sightings in Arizona and their relation to a Hopi prophecy.[42]

As decades passed, more skeptic collections were accessioned until they became the majority. Between 2000 and 2023, of the 30 collections accessioned, only five (17%) were from those who supported the traditional federal conclusion.

This study found differing proportions of beliefs across the institution categories (Fig. 6). Collections whose creators supported the traditional federal conclusions were found in scientific societies twice as often as those who distrusted them (6 vs. 3). In college/university collections, accessions from those who doubted the traditional federal conclusions were twice as prevalent as supporters (28 vs. 11). This study did not identify any collections from those who supported the traditional federal conclusions within public libraries/historical societies; all came from either skeptics or those whose stance was not easily determined.

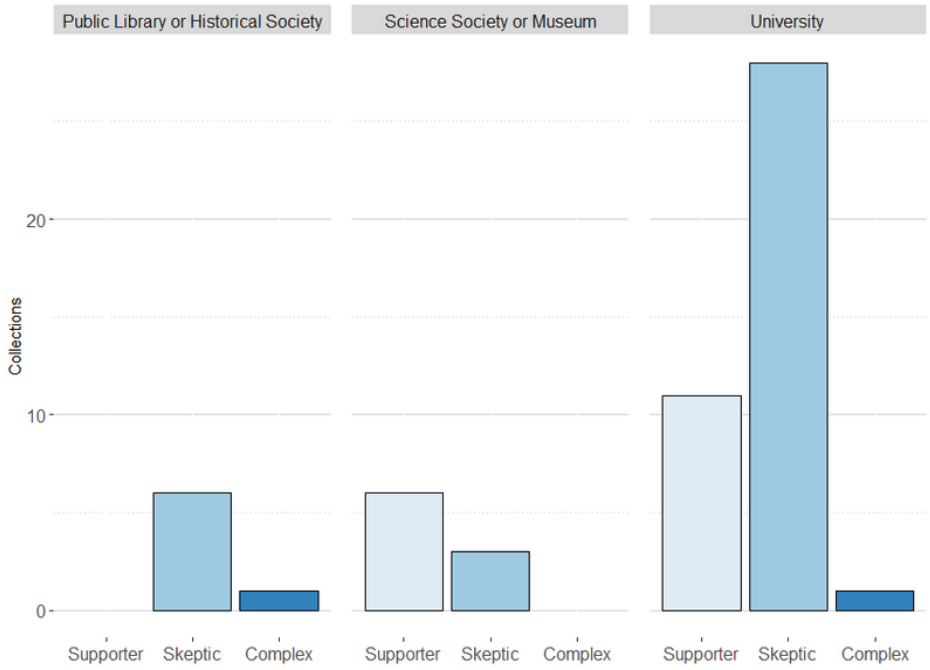

Figure 6. Current number of UFO-related collections in public archives according to creator's stance on government explanations for UFOs, separated by type of holding institution.

This study also looked at the intersection of beliefs and affiliation. Almost all the collections from those who supported the traditional federal conclusions came from creators affiliated with the federal government or military.

Affiliation	Supporter	Skeptic
Federal or military employee	12	15
No government or military affiliation	1	15
Contractor, not employee	1	2

After the initial wave of collections from supporters, a notable group of additions came from UFO researchers who had federal affiliations but were skeptical of those early reports. For example, Chester C. Grusinski and Jack Dean Pickett were both veterans whose collections detail sightings they had while serving.[43]

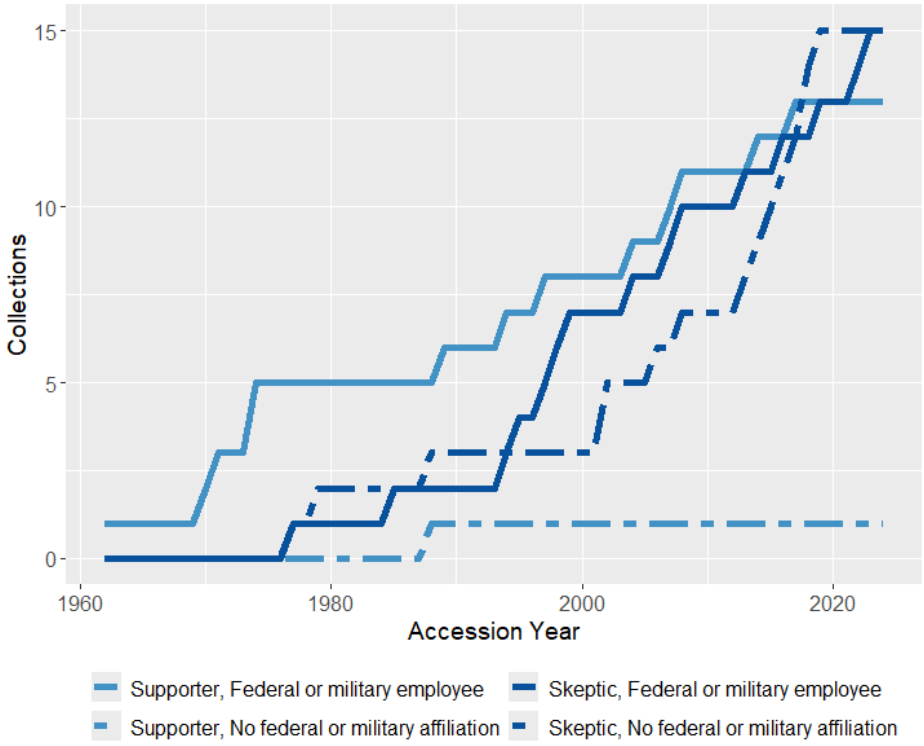

Figure 7. Availability of UFO-related collections over time, shown by stance on government conclusions and creator's affiliation with federal government or military.

Experiencer Content

As mentioned, the experiencer narrative dramatically changed the type of research documents being created and considerations regarding making them public. These considerations include the clinical nature of experiencer therapy, concerns regarding the use of controversial therapies, and the very real traumas of many experiencers.[44]

This project found five collections with first-person experiencer content. This is defined as content where an individual, either the creator of the collection or someone corresponding with the creator, details a personal experiencer event. Additionally, 14 collections had at least one subject term related to UFO abduction or communication with ETs, but did not have first-person experiencer content that could be located.

The earliest collection with first-hand experiencer content was the *R. Leo Sprinkle papers* within the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center.[45] Sprinkle was a University of Wyoming psychologist who became interested in reports of alien abductions in the 1960s. He later came to believe that he, too, was an experiencer.[46] The *Betty and Barney Hill Papers, 1961-2006* were donated by Kathleen Marden to the University of New Hampshire Milne Special Collections and Archives in 2006.[47] The three other collections with experiencer content are all contained within Rice University's Woodson Research Center. They are the

Jacques Vallee UFO and Paranormal Phenomena Papers, the *Wendelle Stevens Ufology Collection*, and the *Anne and Whitley Strieber Collection*.[48] Due to the sensitive nature of these collections, Sprinkle's and Vallee's collections both have embargoes on some of the content which was set in place by the creators. As of this paper's publication, correspondence within the *Anne and Whitley Strieber Collection* is undergoing a de-identification process within the Woodson Research Center.[49]

Major Collectors

The first institution to collect multiple collections containing UFO research content was the American Philosophical Society (APS). The APS was founded in 1743 by Benjamin Franklin with the mission of "promoting useful knowledge."[50] The APS has both a museum and library. The APS manuscript collection includes papers of many of the most notable scientists of the 19th and 20th centuries. Between 1971 and 1978, the APS began accessioning four different collections with UFO research content. The first was Menzel's *Papers concerning UFOs, 1952-1976* which was followed by the *Edward U. Condon Papers*.[51] The *Ivan Terence Sanderson Papers* (previously mentioned) were accessioned in 1977 and the *Philip J. Klass Collection* in 1988.[52] All these collections contain moderate to significant amounts of UFO research. The American Institute of Physics Niels Bohr Library & Archives also holds two collections, the *Samuel A. Goudsmit Papers* and the *American Astronomical Society records 1897-1988* (bulk 1920-1980), although the UFO component is much more minimal than those within the APS.

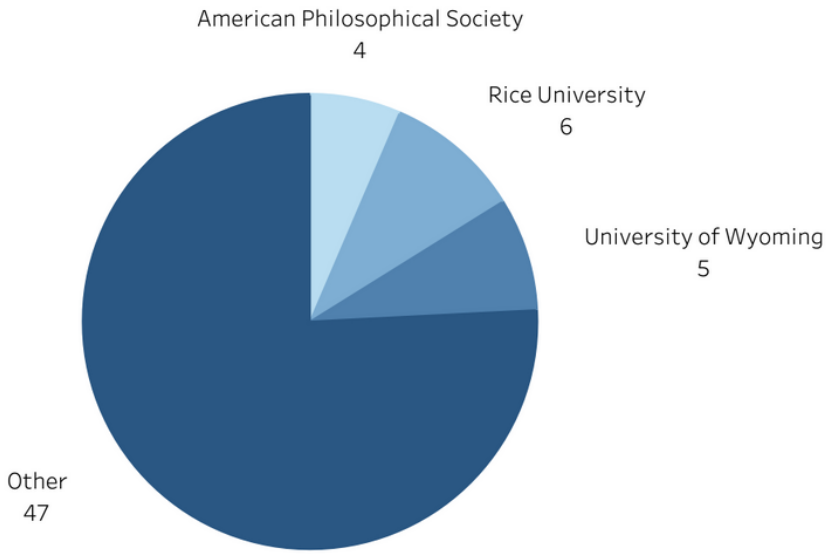

Figure 8. Chart of archives with 4 or more collections containing UFO-related materials, shown as proportion of sample (n=62).

Another substantial collector of UFO-related archival material is the University of Wyoming American Heritage Center (AHC). The AHC was established in 1945 and although its collection development goals have changed over time, the AHC focuses on the history and culture of "Wyoming, the Rocky Mountain Region, and select aspects of the American past."[53] As such, the AHC has a wide range of unique collections which includes five separate collections with UFO content. The first was the *Carlos Allende Papers* starting in 1985.[54] This was followed by the *Frank Scully Papers* in 1988, the *R. Leo Sprinkle Papers*, the *Jack D. Pickett Papers*, and the *Richard F. Haines Papers.*[55]

In the mid 1980s, the University of West Georgia (UWG) Special Collections began developing a unique parapsychology (and paranormal) manuscript collection based on the efforts of Raymond Moody and the UWG Department of Psychology. Moody was primarily interested in near-death experiences and became instrumental in bringing in multiple parapsychology collections to the UWG Special Collections, including two with UFO research content.[56] These are the *Kenneth Ring Papers* and the *Philip C. Paul Papers.*[57] Importantly, the UWG Department of Psychology is the first academic department to enlist their archives to accession multiple collections of UFO research content for the express purpose of conducting in-house research. This popular collection is still growing.[58]

No institution has had as dramatic an impact on UFO research as the Rice University Woodson Research Center (WRC). Between 2017 and 2023, the WRC accessioned six UFO research collections and are currently processing the *John E. Mack Archive*. Accessioning these collections and building a repository of UFO research was the vision of Rice University's Chair of Philosophy and Religious Thought, Jeffrey Kripal.

Kripal himself is a well-known author on subjects of philosophy, religious studies, and the paranormal. Kripal's vision was to build a large, well-curated UFO and paranormal research archive. To do this, Kripal leveraged his reputation to identify and build relationships with other well-known and like-minded researchers who might be willing to donate their collections.[59] Kripal and his team worked closely with the WRC to identify and accession collections. Furthermore, Kripal would brand the collections as the *Archives of the Impossible*.[60] This archive is a global destination for non-affiliated researchers and students alike. An Archives of the Impossible conference was created in 2022 and interest (and the collection) continues to grow.

The first collections accessioned to the WRC were the aforementioned *Jacques Vallee UFO and Paranormal Phenomena Papers* and the *Anne and Whitley Strieber Collection*. Other collections include the *Brenda Denzler Ufology Collection*, the *Larry W. Bryant UFO Research Collection*, the *Richard F. Haines Ufology Papers, 1947-2015* and the previously mentioned *Wendelle Stevens Ufology collection.*[61] Today, the WRC's *Archives of the Impossible* is the preeminent UFO (and paranormal) research collection and the most utilized collection within the institution.[62]

Discussion

At first, in-depth UFO research came only from federal organizations, but a lack of transparency, combined with other post-war factors, generated mistrust from the public. This mistrust resulted in decades of non-federal research. During the 1960s, the first wave of non-federal UFO research appeared. During this time, some of the country's most esteemed scientists believed that they were best suited to conduct such research. These scientists included nobel prize winners, Manhattan Project members, and other leading figures within their fields. Based on the notoriety of these scientists, and the fact that many were older, it is not surprising to see that their collections are the first to appear within public archives.

Some of these early collections contain extensive UFO research documents even when compared to other notable projects that these scientists had worked on. Edward Condon and Howard Menzel were in the forefront of this early research. Based on their contemptuous tone within the media regarding this subject and the plethora of UFO research resources that they created and donated, it was clear that they hoped their research would be the final word on the subject.

Instead of being the final word, however, it was only the beginning of non-federal UFO research. Eventually, the conclusions reached by both these early scientists and the federal government would be disputed by the federal government itself. Within the last few years, several federal agencies have developed UAP investigations, sighting report forms, and disclosure legislation. UFO research has also been embraced within federal archives as is exemplified by the promoted collections, extensive finding aids, and online content found on the websites of the National Archives and the Library of Congress.

The first wave of research that disagreed with the early federal conclusions began arriving in public archives in the 1970s. Many of these collections came from people who had federal or military connections, but did not support the classic conclusions. Some of these researchers had personal UFO experiences. Many had links to various UFO research organizations. Many of these organizations would disband but some groups, particularly MUFON, eventually became large organizations with a large presence across archival collections.

Throughout the UFO phenomenon, there has always been a market for content. It has endured simultaneously along with the phenomenon itself. This economy creates space for authors and researchers. It also creates a unique opportunity for an archive to capitalize on collections. Over the years, UFO research collections have been popular with authors and researchers. Although several archives had multiple UFO research collections, Rice University’s Archives was the first publicly accessible archive to make it a primary focus. This effort would be led by their Chair of Philosophy and Religious Thought, Jeffrey Kripal, and would begin coming to fruition around 2014. Kripal went as far as branding the collection as the *Archives of the Impossible* and today it is the most popular collection at the institution. After its branding, a semi-annual *Archives of the Impossible* conference began on campus and drew researchers from around the world.

Building collections can be complicated when it comes to those involving experiencers. Such complications stem, in part, from archival content involving real traumas, controversial therapies, and identified individuals. When the content involves resources from licensed therapists, there are protocols in place regarding the deidentification of patients and embargoes on access. For other materials such as correspondences outside of a traditional therapeutic context, there are no protocols or best practices. Such issues are exemplified by Rice University's Archives decision to retroactively deidentify the correspondences within the *Anne & Whitley Strieber Collection.*

Overall, this project examined a history of research and archival collections. As with any archival history, it is predictable whose story is, and isn't, presented. The collections inventoried in this study predominantly come from white, English-speaking, cisgender men. This is exacerbated by also detailing a history of science. Although UFOs have a broad cultural appeal, it is clear that certain voices traditionally get promoted while others are excluded. As such, there is a diversity problem amongst these collections. That said, the preservation of a few collections from voices that have not traditionally been included within institutional archives, is worth celebrating–even if they are limited.

The C*hief Dan Katchongva Collection* at the Museum of the American West and the Autry National Center examines UFOs through the framework of Hopi spiritualism which provides a perspective that is typically ignored. Another collection that embraces a wider cultural context is the *Betty and Barney Hill Papers, 1961-2006.* What is often overlooked regarding the Hills is how courageous they were. The Hills, a married interracial couple in 1961, openly talked to the police, press, and therapists about their bizarre experience.[63] Their collection also includes materials regarding their involvement within the NAACP. The *Ted Bloecher Papers, 1950-2000* provides another voice often missing within an archival history. Bloecher's collection is within the New York Public Library (NYPL). The NYPL summarizes the collection as documenting the "daily life of a struggling actor and singer in New York City, gay life before and after Stonewall, and thirty years of UFO research."[64]

The authors believe that summarizing diversity within collections is important for multiple reasons. First, it provides a more complete history of UFO research. The UFO phenomenon has always had a wide appeal although that is not reflected within archival collections. Second, diversity of voices and perspectives makes for better science. Therefore, seeking out diverse collections will lead to a better understanding of the UFO phenomenon itself.

It remains to be seen if the UFO mystery will ever be solved. Multiple generations have searched for answers but the public remains no closer to understanding the phenomenon. This can feel discouraging. What is reassuring though, is the dedication of those working within archives and libraries. If the decades of research can provide answers, archivists, librarians, staff members,and volunteers are diligently working to assure that it is preserved and made discoverable.

Supplemental Data

A .CSV of the collected data from this project is available via the Open Science Framework repository:

https://osf.io/ptjs8/

DOI; 10.17605/OSF.IO/PTJS8

Thank You

David Luftig would like to thank the Washington Library Association for encouraging me to present this research at their conference. I would also like to thank *Alki* for their time, enthusiasm, and for allowing me to tell this story in the way that I wanted. Emily Cukier for your hard work, motivation, and being okay with me utilizing too many endnotes. Amanda Focke & The Woodson Research Center at Rice University, Blynne Olivieri Parker & The University of West Georgia Special Collections, the Virginia Beach Edgar T. Brown Local History Archives, Stephen Buettler at the Timberland Regional Library, Pete McDonnell & Bemidji State University, the Clarksburg-Harrison Regional Library, my family, Ellie (for bringing back UFO high fashion), and my fantastic colleagues at WSU.

Emily Cukier would like to thank D.L. for the opportunity to contribute to this manuscript, my colleagues and supervisors at WSU for encouraging me to go wherever the research seems interesting, and Hilary Noelle Desiree ("George") Millet-Clark for many a late night watching *The X-Files* and eating ice cream directly from the carton.

David Luftig is a Science Librarian at Washington State University. He enjoys working on interdisciplinary research projects and hopes that he does not become known as the "UFO librarian." David remains infuriatingly agnostic on just about everything and envies those who have had paranormal experiences.

Emily Cukier is a Science Librarian at Washington State University. Her interests include biology/life sciences, chemistry, human health and pharmacotherapy, data librarianship, and research ethics. Emily is a member of the ever-growing contingent of purple-haired librarians and happily embraces the stereotypes of the profession, including knitting her own cardigans, reading in coffee shops or cozy chairs at home, and being a kitty mama.

Footnotes

1. Blumenthal, R., & Kean, L. (2020, July 23). No longer in shadows, Pentagon's U.F.O. unit will make some findings public. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/23/us/politics/pentagon-ufo-harry-reid-navy.html. ↩

2. Cooper, H., Blumenthal, R., & Kean, L. (2017, December 16). Glowing auras and 'black money': The Pentagon's mysterious U.F.O. program. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/us/politics/pentagon-program-ufo-harry-reid.html. ↩

3. See Strieber, W. (2020, August 18). *Archives of the Impossible oral history interviews, Whitley Strieber* [Transcript]. Archives of the Impossible, Rice University. https://web.archive.org/web/20220702085930/https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/110197/wrc15848_transcript.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y, or Vallee, J. (2021, February 11). *Oral history interview of Dr. Jacques Vallee, online via Zoom* [Transcript]. Archives of the Impossible, Rice University. https://web.archive.org/web/20220203161837/https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/111924/wrc16947_transcript.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y ↩

4. Gray Barker was an author, miscreant, and hoaxer. His legacy to UFO researchers is complicated at best. Otto Binder was a science fiction and comic book author who was interested in UFOs. His collection at the Texas A&M University Cushing Memorial Library & Archives has very little UFO content within it. ↩

5. The term "UAP" began appearing in the press around 1987 as a replacement for "UFO." Incidentally, "UFO" was created by the federal government in 1952 to replace "flying saucer" and "flying disc." See United States Air Force. (n.d.). *Unidentified Flying Objects*. Air Force Declassification Office. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from https://www.secretsdeclassified.af.mil/Top-Flight-Documents/Unidentified-Flying-Objects/ and Becket, S. (2023, September 14). *What are UAPs, and why do UFOs have a new name?* CBS News. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-are-uaps-unexplained-aerial-phenomenon-ufos-new-name/. ↩

6. Moultrie, R. & Kirkpatrick, S. (2022, December 16). *USD (I&S) Ronald Moultrie and Dr. Sean Kirkpatrick Media Roundtable on the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office* [Transcript]. *U.S. Department of Defense*. https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3249303/usdis-ronald-moultrie-and-dr-sean-kirkpatrick-media-roundtable-on-the-all-domai/. ↩

7. Newman, L. S. & Baumeister, R. F. (1996). Toward an explanation of the UFO abduction phenomenon: Hypnotic elaboration, extraterrestrial sadomasochism, and spurious memories. *Psychological Inquiry*, *7*(2), 99–126. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0702_1. ↩

8. Blumenthal, R. (2021, September 24). *The Experience: The cultural rise of alien abductions and those who encounter them*. The Debrief. https://thedebrief.org/the-experience-the-cultural-rise-of-alien-abductions-and-those-who-encounter-them/. ↩

9.

For a short and well-reasoned overview, the authors recommend:

1. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/a-brief-cultural-history-of-ufos-from-secret-soviet-weapons-to-alien-visitors
2. Thurs, D. P. (2007). Chapter 4. UFOs: In the shadow of science. In Science Talk (pp. 123–158). Rutgers University Press. https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813541525-006
3. Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, April 21, 2024: UFOs.

↩

10. For a historic example, see the 1561 celestial phenomenon over Nuremberg. ↩

11.

Although not producing the breadth of research that contemporary UFOs did, four collections did end up within public archives.

1. *Clinton Williams collection, 1896-1897*. Western Michigan University Zhang Legacy Archives and Regional History Collection.
2. *Guide to the statement on sighting of an unidentified flying object in 1896, Recorded in 1961*. Stanford University Libraries Department of Special Collections and University Archives.
3. *Arthur Bray fonds*. University of Ottawa Archives and Special Collections.
4. *Philip Klass collection*. American Philosophical Society.

↩

12. Interestingly, within Europe there had been extensive UFO sightings during WWII (see foo-fighters) and in the immediate years following (see ghost rockets). ↩

13. See Bullard, T. E. (2010). *The myth and mystery of UFOs*. University Press of Kansas. https://archive.org/details/mythmysteryofufo0000bull/page/26/mode/2up?view=theater&q=craze, and Bloecher, T. (2005). *Report on the UFO Wave of 1947* (2nd ed.). National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena. http://kirkmcd.princeton.edu/JEMcDonald/bloecher_67.pdf. ↩

14. Search strings included: UFO* OR flying saucer* OR unidentified flying object*. They also included variations of experiencer OR abducte*. Subject terms included: Unidentified flying objects -- Sightings and encounters; Human-alien encounters; Unidentified flying objects; Unidentified flying object literature; Ufologists; Extraterrestrial beings; Alien abduction; Enlèvement extraterrestre; Extraterrestres; Rencontres avec les extraterrestres; Civilization, Ancient -- Extraterrestrial influences; Great Airship Mystery, 1896-1897; Airships -- History -- 19th century; Airships; abductee. ↩

15. This includes two separate collections for Edward U. Condon (APS and University of Colorado Libraries) and Richard F. Haines (University of Wyoming and Rice University). ↩

16. Haines, G. K. (1999). CIA's role in the study of UFOs, 1947-90: A die-hard issue. *Intelligence and national security*, *14*(2), 26–48. ↩

17. Lynch, G. (2024, January 12). Project Blue Book: 12,000-plus UFO reports were once investigated at Wright-Patt. *Dayton Daily News*. https://www.daytondailynews.com/local/project-blue-book-12000-plus-ufo-reports-were-once-investigated-at-wright-patt/6WO7QHDVLJGQXKL4CJQJSO7CGY/. ↩

18. Marker, J. (2019, December 4). Public interest in UFOs persists 50 Years after Project Blue Book termination. *National Archives News*. https://www.archives.gov/news/articles/project-blue-book-50th-anniversary ↩

19. Holden, C. (1976). Air Force bestows on National Archives a trove for Ufologists. *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)*, *193*(4254), 662–663. ↩

20. See Gerstein, J. (2023, January 30). *Calls mount to curb classification*. Politico. https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/30/calls-mount-to-curb-classification-00080315, and Haines, G. K. (1999). CIA's role in the study of UFOs, 1947-90: A die-hard issue. *Intelligence and National Security*, *14*(2), 26–48. ↩

21. Wendling, M. (2024, March 8). US says UFO sightings likely secret military tests. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-68515515 ↩

22.

See:

1. BBC News. (2008, May 14). Files released on UFO sightings. *BBC News*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7398108.st
2. Reuters. (2007, August 9). French space agency to publish UFO archive online. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL29796180/
3. McCoy, T. (2023, September 9). In Brazil, the truth about UFO information is out there in the public record. *The Washington Post*.https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/06/ufo-brazil-documents-

↩

23. Officially known as the *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*. ↩

24. Donald Menzel was an astronomer, astrophysicist, and author. He was also one of the most prominent UFO debunkers of the time. *Menzel's papers concerning UFOs, 1952-1976* is a twelve linear foot, collection that was accessioned into the American Philosophical Society from 1977-1982. Roy Craig was a professor at Texas A&M University and also a debunker. The ten linear foot *Roy Craig collection on the scientific study of unidentified flying objects papers: 1963-ca. 2002* was accessioned in 2003 into the Cushing Memorial Library and Archives at Texas A&M University. It contains working files from the Condon Committee. ↩

25. The *Samuel A. Goudsmit papers* span thirty linear feet and were accessioned into the American Institute of Physics Niels Bohr Library & Archives from 1978-1986. The *Franklin E. Roach papers* measure 11.68 cubic feet and contain one box of UFO materials. It was accessioned into the University of Alaska Fairbanks Alaska and Polar Regions Collections from 1994 until 2013. The *Leon Davidson's flying saucer collection, 1950-1980* was accessioned into the Columbia University from 1962 through 1968 and in 1984. Davidson is notable because he believed that if the federal government was more transparent with their UFO research, the public would come to agree with their conclusions. As such, Davidson was instrumental in convincing the USAF to share the primary report section of Project Blue Book, in its entirety, with the public. ↩

26. The sixty-six linear foot *James E. McDonald papers* were accessioned into the University of Arizona Special Collection in 1997 and contain extensive UFO materials. His collection spans the years 1904-1997. ↩

27. McDonald, J. E. (1969, December 27). *Science in default: Twenty-Two years of inadequate UFO investigations*. American Association for the Advancement of Science, 134th Meeting General Symposium, Unidentified Flying Objects. http://kirkmcd.princeton.edu/JEMcDonald/mcdonald_aaas_69.pdf ↩

28. The *J. Allen Hynek papers* is a fourteen-box collection within the Northwestern University Archives that was accessioned in 1988 and 1992. ↩

29. Lopez, A. M. (2017, June 9). Raymond Hudd Photographs and Papers. *Chicago History Museum*. https://www.chicagohistory.org/raymondhudd/ ↩

30. *See MUFON* homepage. Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://mufon.com/. ↩

31. This includes The Ohio History Connection, which holds the *Mutual UFO Network of Ohio Records* (eleven boxes of materials accessioned from 1991-2006), and The Ohio State University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library's *William E. Jones collection on unidentified flying objects (UFOs), 1940-2013* (a 25.01 cubic foot collection accessioned from 1979 – 2013). ↩

32. Studies show that such therapy can make patients susceptible to suggestion and, therefore, this method is suspect. See Newman, L. S. & Baumeister, R. F. (1996). Toward an explanation of the UFO abduction phenomenon: Hypnotic elaboration, extraterrestrial sadomasochism, and spurious memories. *Psychological Inquiry*, *7*(2), 99–126. ↩

33. Mack, although an esteemed psychologist and author, would be fiercely criticized for his methodology when dealing with experiencers. Mack's tenure at Harvard University became threatened which resulted in disciplinary hearings. Mack retained his tenure and the hearing is archived by Harvard within the *The Arnold S. Relman papers* (currently embargoed). See Lenzer, J. (2004). John E Mack. *The BMJ*, *329*(7471), 920. ↩

34. Leon Davidson was a prominent scientist and engineer who helped develop the atomic bomb. His 65 linear feet (52 boxes) collection was accessioned by the Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library from 1962-1968 and in 1984. ↩

35. This information was typically located through finding aids and obituaries. ↩

36. The federal affiliations of three subjects were unable to be verified. Additionally, four collections came from organizations. ↩

37. This information was inferred through finding aids, first person accounts, and occasionally additional resources (such as obituaries). Such classification schema does not account for the wide range of beliefs regarding the causes of the UFO phenomenon. ↩

38. Two examples from the latter two classifications: J. Allen Hynek, who began as a federal conclusion supporter but eventually changed his mind; and Gray Barker a well-known hoaxer whose actual beliefs aren't clear. ↩

39. This coding schema provides interesting ways to view data, but nuance is lost. For example, Leon Davidson believed that UFOs were covert government projects. As such, Davidson goes into the categorization of supporting the conclusions of those federal reports despite thinking those reports were covering up information. ↩

40. The collection is twenty-seven linear feet covering the years 1920-1973. It has a moderate amount of UFO research content. ↩

41. Autry Museum of the American West archivist (2024, March 4). Personal communication [email]. ↩

42. The *Chief Dan Katchongva Collection* was donated in the late 1970s by Helen Addison Howard (aka Helen Overland). The collection consists of four folders covering various subjects. A related collection, *Chief Dan Katchongva Correspondence* (one folder), was also donated by Helen Addison Howard and processed in 2000. ↩

43. Chester C. Grusinski was onboard the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt when the crew witnessed a UFO. The *Chester C. Grusinski papers* at the East Carolina University Libraries is a fifty-eight page collection which includes correspondence with other crew members, federal agencies, and researchers. Jack Dean Pickett was also a veteran. Pickett observed four disc-shaped UFOs near the MacDill Air Force Base (Florida) in 1967. The *Jack D. Pickett papers*, at the University of Wyoming, is a 2.80 cubic ft. collection containing original research and correspondence with federal agencies. ↩

44. Newman, L. S., & Baumeister, R. F. (1996). Toward an explanation of the UFO abduction phenomenon: Hypnotic elaboration, extraterrestrial sadomasochism, and spurious memories. *Psychological inquiry*, *7*(2), 99–126. ↩

45. The *R. Leo Sprinkle papers, 1961-2017* is a 77.9 cubic foot collection (with an additional 13.6 GB of content) that was accessioned between 2004 and -2018. The collection includes correspondence, research into therapies, and other materials. Four of the eighty-four boxes have embargoes until 2095. ↩

46. Sprinkle, R. L. (1988). Psychotherapeutic services for persons who claim UFO experiences. *Psychotherapy in private practice*, *6*(3). ↩

47. Marden is the niece of the Hills and has written extensively on UFOs and experiencers. The *Betty and Barney Hill papers, 1961-2006* is a seven box, 2.33 cubic foot, collection. It includes correspondence, personal journals, audio/visual content, and Betty Hill's dress from the night of the event. ↩

48. Jacque Vallee is a notable author, scientist, philosopher, and venture capitalist. The thirty-eight linear foot collection spans the years 1960-2015 (some materials have an embargo until 2028 or 2031). The collection was accessioned in 2018. Wendelle Stevens was an Army veteran who dedicated much of his life to UFO and experiencer research. His eight linear foot collection was accessioned in 2023. Whitley Strieber is an author who wrote the best-seller *Communion: A true story* where he details his experiencer story. His collection is nine linear feet and spans the years 1970-2016. It was accessioned in 2017 and includes multiple boxes of correspondence from experiencers. ↩

49. Focke, A. (2024, April 25). Rice University Woodson Research Center. Personal communication [email]. ↩

50. American Philosophical Society. (2024). *About the APS*. https://www.amphilsoc.org/about. ↩

51. Menzel's *Papers concerning UFOs, 1952-1976* was accessioned from 1971 until 1982. It is a twelve linear foot collection and consists of around 12,000 items.

The Condon papers were deposited at the APS Library in 1974. It is a seventy-five linear foot collection with six series. Series V is labeled "UFO materials" and comprises thirty-three boxes (16.5 linear feet). ↩

52. Philip Klass was an engineer and aviation journalist. He was a well-known debunker and made many media appearances. The *Philip J. Klass Collection* is a thirty-six linear foot collection that ranges from 1948-2000. ↩

53. *American Heritage Center collections management policy*. (2008). University of Wyoming American Heritage Center. https://www.uwyo.edu/ahc/_files/policies/collection-mgmt-policy.pdf. ↩

54. Carlos Allende was a former marine who claimed to have witnessed the transportation of a large navy ship in what would be known as the "Philadelphia Experiment." Allende's collection is two cubic feet and covers a wide range of topics. It covers the years 1943-1994 and was accessioned from 1985-1995. ↩

55.

Frank Scully was an author and journalist who wrote about a wide range of topics. His book *Behind the flying saucers* (1950) detailed UFOs and recovered ETs. The 15.25 cubic foot collection spans the years 1924-1985 and covers many subjects. Jack Dean Pickett, another military veteran, observed four disc-shaped UFOs near the MacDill Air Force Base (Florida) in 1967. The *Jack D. Pickett papers*, at the University of Wyoming, is a 2.80 cubic ft. collection containing original research and correspondence with federal agencies.

Richard H. Haines has two separate collections containing UFO content, one within the University of Wyoming and the other at Rice University. Haines was an experimental psychologist who had worked at NASA. In retirement Haines researched UFOs. Haines' twenty-two cubic foot collection was accessioned into the University of Wyoming in 2019.

↩

56. Olivieri Parker, B. (2024, February 26). University of West Georgia. Personal communication [phone interview]. ↩

57. Kenneth Ring is a psychologist and author who studies the similarities between near death experiences, UFOs, and experiencers. *The Kenneth Ring papers* were accessioned in 2018 and is a 65.91 linear foot (149 box) collection. Philip Paul is a psychologist who studied a wide range of paranormal subjects. His 4.20 linear foot (10 box) collection covers the years 1972 to 2002 and was accessioned in 2022. ↩

58. Olivieri Parker, B. (2024, February 26). University of West Georgia. Personal communication [phone interview]. ↩

59. Smith, B. (2024, April 9). A decade of discovery: 10 years of Rice's Archives of the Impossible. *Rice news and media relations. Rice University*. https://news.rice.edu/news/2024/decade-discovery-10-years-rices-archives-impossible. ↩

60. Focke, A. (2023, May 11). Rice University Woodson Research Center. Personal communication [interview]. ↩

61. Brenda Denzler is an author and researcher who has written about the cultural history and significance of UFO and experiencer narratives. The collection spans the 1990s and 2000s. It is ten linear feet and was accessioned in 2019-2020. Larry Bryant was an author and researcher who examined military and political connections to the UFO phenomenon. His 103 linear foot collection, spanning the years of 1920-2010, was accessioned 2019. The *Richard F. Haines Ufology Papers 1947-2015* at Rice University is seventeen linear feet and was accessioned 2020. ↩

62. Confirmed by Focke, A. (2023, May 11). Rice University Woodson Research Center. Personal communication [interview]. ↩

63. Fuller, J. G. (1966, October 4). Aboard a flying saucer: The adventures of two “kidnapped” humans. *LOOK*, 33–56. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81R00560R000100010003-8.pdf ↩

64. Yurevich, L. (n.d.). *Ted Bloecher papers* (MssCol 5984). New York Public Library Archives & Manuscripts. Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://archives.nypl.org/mss/5984. ↩